DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 290 SP 037 414

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TITLE Discovering Students' Voices in Teachers' Classroom Inquiry.
PUB DATE 97
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Action Research; *Classroom Communication; Classroom Techniques; College School Cooperation; Elementary Education; Elementary School Teachers; Higher Education; *Inquiry; Inservice Teacher Education; *Participative Decision Making; Partnerships in Education; *Student Participation; *Teacher Researchers; Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

This study is part of a large project on teacher research and professional development in progress in the Teacher Enhancement Program (TEP), a collaborative mid-career program between the University of New Mexico and local public schools. The objective of the study was to describe teachers' engagement in classroom inquiry and the transformative process by which teachers awoke to their students' new voices and ways of participation in the classroom as well as the impact on their teaching methods and philosophy. Participants were 24 teachers attending TEP and the program staff during the semester of the course in teacher research. Teachers' involvement in their Classroom Systematic Inquiry Project (CSIP) was assisted by a peer support group, readings, whole group presentations and conversations, and the corresponding peer support member of the staff. Teacher perceptions of the new dimensions they discovered in their students were identified by means of discourse analysis of oral and written presentation of their inquiry projects and meetings. Findings indicated: teachers' transformative process went from skepticism to increased democratization of their classrooms; teachers awakened to their students' new voices, thereby becoming aware of their own teaching transformation; although skeptical and fearful at the beginning of the course, teachers eventually became fully engaged in their classroom inquiry. It was concluded that enhancing collaboration and more democratic student participation in the classroom is a necessary but not sufficient condition to assure culturally relevant teaching. (Contains 39 references.) (Author/LH)

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ED 409 290

DISCOVERING STUDENTS' VOICES IN TEACHERS' CLASSROOM INQUIRY

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Paper presented at AERA 1997 - Chicago, March 24-28

ABSTRACT

This study is part of a larger project on teacher-research and professional development in progress in the Teacher Enhancement Program (TEP), a collaborative mid-career program between The University of New Mexico and the public schools of the area. The objective of the study was to describe teachers' engagement in classroom inquiry and the transformative process by which teachers awoke to their students' 'new voices' and ways of participation in classrooms as well as the impact on their teaching philosophy and methods. Participants were 24 teachers from different cultural backgrounds who were attending TEP, and the program staff during the semester of the course in teacher-research. Teachers' involvement in their Classroom Systematic Inquiry Project (CSIP) was assisted by a peer-support group, readings, whole-group presentations and conversations and the corresponding peer support teacher member of the staff. Teachers' perceptions of the new dimensions they discovered in their students were identified by means of discourse analysis of the oral and written presentation of their inquiry projects, final presentation of the program, some of the peer-support-group meetings, staff meetings and whole-group conversations. In addition, field notes and context information completed the data basis for analysis. The conclusions of the study are as follows: 1) Teachers' transformative process, which was facilitated by their engagement in a systematic inquiry of their teaching, went from skepticism to increased democratization of their classrooms, awakening to their students' 'new voices' and thereby becoming aware of their own teaching transformation; 2) Although skeptical and fearful at the beginning of the course, teachers eventually became fully engaged in their classroom inquiry, linking it to their teaching as an ongoing process; 3) Enhancing collaboration and more democratic student participation in the classroom is a necessary but not sufficient condition to assure culturally relevant teaching. Teachers' engagement in classroom systematic inquiry is undoubtedly a transformative experience impacting their teaching both by deepening the understanding of their students and their own perspectives on education, and by carrying out significative changes and improvement in their teaching. These are very good reasons for making teacher-research an integral part of teacher education. *Descriptors*: students' voices, teacher-research, sociocultural approach, dialogism, teacher education.

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BACKGROUND

This study is part of a larger project on Teacher-research and professional development in progress in the Teacher Enhancement Program (TEP), a collaborative program between The University of New Mexico and the Public Schools of the area. TEP as a mid-career program gives teachers opportunities to reflect on their experiences as teachers and learners, to experience and build networks of collegial support, and to actively participate in selecting curriculum for a master's degree according to their needs and interests. Teacher-research principles and techniques may facilitate the operationalization of such a philosophy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Examine teachers' engagement in classroom inquiry and the transformative process by which teachers awoke to their students' 'new voices' and ways of participation in classroom decisions.
- Establish the implications and connections of this awakening to students' voices with their changes in teaching philosophy and methods.
- Determine whether or not the transformative process experienced by teachers, while doing classroom inquiry in the context of TEP, led them to develop more culturally relevant teaching.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Most of the programs of teacher education follow the logic of *instrumental reason,* which is the predominant way of thinking of industrialized societies. Popkewitz (1987) describes the discourse of teacher education, a kind of competence-based model, in terms of instrumental reason:

> "It is assumed that there is a common framework of experiences for all people and fixed goals. The problem of training is to identify the most appropriate means to attain given ends. Strategies to improve teacher education are to increase effectiveness and coordination of programs. A science of teacher education is to identify the specific effects that influence movement towards the defined ends. The language of instrumental reason is important because it projects an image of rational thought and institutional efficiency. The style of thought creates a view of human activity that is highly specialized, fragmented and impersonal" (p.11).

An alternative to instrumental reason might be *communicative reason*, as defined by Habermas (1984) in his Theory of Communicative Action. The logic of instrumental reason concerning human action is to set up goals, and to arrange and control means to reach those goals. On the contrary, human action oriented by communicative reason is characterized by dialogical interaction by which participants overcome subjective views and work together toward intersubjective understanding and development of social life.

This study is framed broadly within a sociocultural and dialogical perspective of education in general and teacher education in particular, which is quite compatible with communicative reason. Thus, dialogical interaction mediated by cultural tools such as language and ways of thinking is crucial for building a community of inquirers, the growing voices of teachers and their students, the sharing of experiences and stories, in sum constructing meaning and knowledge together. This approach is to a great extent the TEP approach to teacher education.

By and large a sociocultural perspective of education, as defined in this paper, has been nourished with the work of three thinkers and educators: Vygotsky (1978, 1987) Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Freire (1992/1970). Although they emerged in different domains: Vygotsky in psychology, Bakhtin in philosophy of language and Freire in educational philosophy and adult education, their work has crossed not only geographic but disciplinary boundaries. The domain of education has been a fruitful terrain for the development of those authors' ideas individually and/or integrated. Thus, Bakhtin's notions of voice and dialogue, Freire's pedagogy of dialogue and community building, and Vygotsky's cultural-historical approach to human development and cognition are intimately interrelated. All of them share premises concerning language as ideological and cultural, and take dialogical interaction as a *sine qua non* condition for being, knowing, understanding, learning and development including cognitive, personal and professional development - even the growing of personal voice is an interactional process.

For Bakhtin and Freire, *dialogue* goes beyond the mere verbal face-to-face interaction between two persons, to involve several persons whose utterances may be distant in time and space. Bakhtin attributes to the language and particularly to the utterance a dialogical character. Thus, each utterance is a response to prior utterances and is also a generator of future utterances. Meanwhile, Freire defines dialogue as "the encounter between men [women] mediated by the world in order to name the world" (p.76, brackets added). Whereas Bakhtin's notion of dialogue with regard to the nature of utterance is descriptive, Freire's is prescriptive.

At any rate, Bakhtin's and Freire's understanding of dialogue is concerned with the sense and reality of human existence. Hence for them, *to be* as human beings is *to-be-in-relation*, that is, in an ongoing dialogue. Consequently *knowing*, even the knowing of oneself, is a dialogical process. Freire emphasizes the horizontality or symmetry of power in the relationship among dialoguers to attain true communication, which is the basis of an authentic education. In this sense true dialogue among teachers and between teachers and students is quite rare. However, when it does occur, the consequences are almost immediate and surprising such as the growing of teachers' voices and thereby the growing of students' voices.

Whereas Bakhtin and Freire are talking about dialogue as the way of being and knowing, Vygotsky (1978, 1987) talks about learning and development as children and adults interact in the *zone of proximal development* by using cultural means such as language. Moll and Whitmore (1993) develop a broader and more dynamic notion of *zpd* than that usually alluded to in the empirical studies framed within the Vygotskian theory. Moll and Whitmore study the dynamics of the interaction between students and their teacher and among the students themselves in several collaborative situations where the roles tutor-tutoree were rotated depending on the specific activity. They also studied the ways in which this classroom used social and cultural resources, co-constructed meaning, shared control and developed mutual trust. The authors refer to this as a *collective zpd,* which due to its encompassing character seems more useful for studying situations which are complex by nature and very difficult to analyze with the one-to-one approach.

Inspired by Bakhtin's dialogism, Wertsch (1991) and Graumann (1990), among others, characterize dialogue as a 'polyphony of voices': "The polyphony of dialogue originates in the variety of voices both between and within interlocutors" (Graumann, 1990, p.122). Linell and Jõnsson (1991) interpret Bakhtin's (1986) notion of voices as the "ways of articulating perspectives and concerns that are prototypical of different traditions of thought and discourse in modern society" (p.77). Thus, voice and dialogue are relational terms, as is perspective. Regarding voice, Wertsch (1991) considers that Bakhtin's notion of voice "cannot be reduced to an account of vocal-auditory signals... It applies to written as well as spoken communication, and it is concerned with the broader issues of a speaking subject's perspective, conceptual horizon, intention, and world view" (p.51). Attempting to summarize Bakhtin's notion of voice, Holquist and Emerson (1981) define it as "the speaking personality, speaking consciousness" (p.434). Although the pervasive character of structures and ideologies within individual voices is real, as Linell and Luckmann (1991) point out, it is important to consider also the reciprocity of this influence; that is, the impact of some individual voices on the

transformation of those social structures and ideologies to improve human living. In this pursuit, Fairclough (1992) proclaims the power of the discourse and Freire (1992) proclaims the power of the pedagogy of dialogue.

Concerning teachers' voices, Elbaz (1990) considers that voice "is always used against the background of a previous silence, and it is a political usage as well as an epistemological one" (p.17). Teacher's voice is a commitment "to return to teachers the right to speak for and about teaching" (p.17). She then describes what she means by teacher's voice: "the first is the power to name, to define one's own reality and to determine, at least in part, the way the rest of the world must relate to that reality; the second is the power to care for and sustain oneself and others, to maintain the dignity and integrity of those named" (p.17). For Elbaz, to have a 'voice' implies to have a language for articulating our own concerns, to recognize those concerns and to have an audience who will really listen to us. The growing of teachers' group voices is an important support for the growing of individual voice (Torres, 1996c).

The growing of voices from a previous silence is an issue of empowerment. Freire's (1992/1970) conception of liberation and liberating pedagogy is equivalent to empowerment when and if it implies to work *with*, and not *for* or *over* others, in order to develop a true voice; so to speak teachers working *with* students to develop their voices. Thus, part of the development of teachers' voices is the development of students' voices. For O'Loughlin (1990), acknowledging students' voice "is also an affirmation of the diverse cultures, languages and perspectives that students hold" (p.13).

Relations of power between teachers and students are a crucial factor in the growing of students voices. Cummins (1993) indicates three types of interaction of power relations concerning minority students' empowerment: "1) the classroom interaction between teachers and students; 2) relationships between schools and the minority community; and (3) the intergroup power relations within the society as a whole" (p.102). He urges the redefining and readdressing of these relations of power for educational reform to be successful, especially with regard to children from minority and working families. O' Loughlin and Serra's (1996) work with inner-city school children on literacy based on personal and culturally relevant stories, is very insightful of the potential and power of the stories they could write, although they had been 'labeled' and marginalized as illiterate. They express their amusement with the children's stories in these terms:

> "We are haunted by the children's voices. We hear the beauty, the potential, the yearning for affirmation and connection. We warm to the beauty of their expressions of love. We marvel at the imaginativeness of their boundary crossings. We delight in their raucous sense of humor, astute reading of their situations, and playful humor and carnivalesque caricatures of the oppression they experience" (p.62).

In the same vein, Watanabe-Batton proposes to document children's voices through the collaborative analysis of their talk at least a few times per year to reflect on what is going on in the classroom the children's perspectives.

From the sociocultural and dialogical perspective frame of this study, the students' voices may be defined in the following terms: The power to express their feelings toward and participate actively in curriculum decisions and to enhance its cultural relevance; power to voice out what is meaningful and relevant to them, to 'read the word and the world', and to claim participation and ownership in the decisions concerning their academic future and life.

In the search for voice, a group of pionering teachers in Philadelphia Writing Project have worked together and with their students to empower themselves through teacher-research with great emphasis on journal writing. Teacher-research has been considered as a new paradigm of research for teacher empowerment (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen, 1994; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993); the basis for "changing schools from within" (Wells, 1994); "a way of knowing" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993) or embedded in teaching, that is "teaching as research" (Atkin, 1992; Duckworth, 1987). This systematic link between teaching and research may provide different and revolutionary avenues for teacher education, such as "Teacher education as narrative inquiry" (Clandinin, 1993).
Even though by definition *teacher research* implies that teachers are studying their own classrooms, the engagement in this type of activity is a great opportunity to do collaborative work with other teachers with whom they share concerns, interests and perspectives. Thus, the research projects become the substance of their conversations while building cognitive, professional, social and psychological links among themselves: that is, growing as a community.

This present study is an action-research study of teachers' transformative process as they engaged in a Classroom Systematic Inquiry Project, including the impact on their teaching and curriculum development perspectives.

METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

Participants and setting

Twenty-four teachers (22 women and 2 men) participated in this study, fifteen "European-American" and nine Hispanic, who are teaching at different academic levels from kindergarten through high school, mainstream and special education. Teachers were attending TEP one day a week and the remaining days they were working in their classrooms. Also participating in this study were three Peer Support Teachers (PSTs) and the coordinator of the program (they were the staff), of which I was also a member assigned by the university to teach this course on teacher research.

Classroom systematic inquiry project (CSIP):

One of the core activities in the Spring semester was the CSIP which focused on the study of teachers' own practice. In planning and conducting this project teachers were assisted by means of the following:

- Systematic Inquiry Group (SIG): A small group of 4 or 5 self-selected peers and a member of the staff. The main purpose of this group was to share their experiences in doing the CSIP. They presented what they were doing or asked for help regarding specific aspects of the project. The other members responded by giving feedback and suggestions, asking questions, commenting on or challenging what their colleague was doing. The group also engaged in joint interpretation and understanding of the situation at hand.

- Peer Support Teachers (PSTs): In this group there were three support teachers (2 women and 1 man), who are teachers selected to participate as members of the program staff. The two women had participated in TEP previously and the man has a master's degree outside TEP. PSTs visit teachers in their classrooms and help them to collect information in cases when the focus of observations was the teacher him/herself in action. In addition, they play the role of dialogue partners of the teachers for studying and improving their teaching.

- Readings on distinctive characteristics, methods and techniques of teacher-research, as well as models of teacher-research studies.

- Presentations and conversations in the whole group. There were three presentations for the whole group concerning specifically the distinctive characteristics of teacher research, methods of classroom systematic inquiry, analysis and interpretation of data, and ethics in informed

consent. Conversations on common issues concerning the inquiry project followed these presentations and also came up at other times in the whole group.

- Inductive approach: The conceptualization of teacher-research principles and approaches was carried out on the basis of teachers' own experiences in doing their classroom inquiry project.

Sources of data

- Presentation by each teacher of her/his CSIP to a group of peers. The oral presentation was tape recorded. In addition, teachers turned in a brief work-in-progress report and a reflection on their own process.

- Field notes of some of the SIG meetings (one small group each weekly session) and the whole-group conversations on CSIPs and other educational issues.

- TEP Staff meetings, specifically the segment dedicated to inform, discuss and plan the CSIPs, were tape recorded. In this situation PSTs referred to specific projects as well as their broad perception of the development of the projects at that point in time.

- Participants' final presentations, specifically the component referred to as her/his 'inquiry project', were tape recorded.

Discourse analysis

The content analysis of teachers' discourse (oral and written) allowed me to identify themes and processes and actions. This analysis was supported by my own field notes, and the verbal reports of the peer support teachers about participants' development of their classroom inquiry. Excerpts of teachers' discourse are used to illustrate the description of the processes and the different aspects of each theme.

INQUIRING INTO TEACHING WITH STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION: SOME TESTIMONIES

Teachers' engagement in classroom systematic inquiry implies overcoming the serious obstacles of teachers' overloaded schedules and the very little or - more often - absent support on the part of school administration of teachers' efforts to engage in inquiry to improve their teaching. In addition, teachers' education and professional experience have promoted and unintentionally supported the divorce between educational research and researchers on one side and teaching and teachers on the other.

The Classroom Systematic Inquiry, as a central part of The Teacher Enhancement Program these teachers were attending, is completely compatible with the philosophy of the program with regard to the principles of reflective practice, community building and social construction of knowledge. In effect, the Systematic Inquiry Project (SIP) is an operationalization of those principles within the context of the whole program.

In this paper I am going to refer to 'students' voices' as they emerge in teachers' discourse when they talk about their SIP and their experiences in attending TEP. Verbal reports and comments by the peer support teachers in the planning meeting ratified to a great extent teachers' discourse about their experiences.

Overcoming skepticism, fears and resistance to engage in classroom inquiry

Before these teachers became aware of other dimensions of their students' voices distinct from those they were used to, they had to deal with their own fears, skepticism and resistance to engaging in systematic inquiry in their classrooms. These feelings were quite common among participants, except for three out of 24 who were enthusiastic about doing research in their classroom. I wrote in my journal after introducing the systematic inquiry project to TEP participants:

> "These teachers do not seem enthusiastic about doing this project. They seem fearful and skeptical. I was afraid of that but reality has exceeded my predictions. We (staff) will need to work on these issues directly, by giving them other teachers' inquiry projects to read which might help them to see possibilities and benefits from doing research in class" (January 25).

A few teachers verbalized those feelings in their presentations or in the last reflections on the SIP. For example, Jan was very skeptical of the idea of doing any kind of 'formal research':

> "The research project was not one that I approached with enthusiasm. Having never conducted formal research, the prospect of designing and conducting a project of this scope and presenting the results was overwhelming" (Reflection on the SIP).

Patricia was very fearful and doubtful:

> "When I first heard the word research I was terrified... I had always related research to a scientific project. I had never been a researcher, so I had my doubts. I'm glad now that I had doubts, because without them I would not have learned much" (Reflection on the SIP).

As teachers initiated their projects by reading other teachers' persuasive writing about their own classroom inquiries, they began to understand that the project they had become engaged in was different from their previous idea of research. Once they met together in small groups to talk about what classroom inquiry meant for them, a constructive appropriation began. Some of their remarks showed their preconceptions of research as a very alien and rigid activity: One group remarked. "Research is not a scary thing - we can do it!! We can do it!... We don't have to know everything". Another group wrote: "Research does not necessarily mean library work. There is so much diversity in the process that it allows for freedom and creativity".

From skepticism and fearfulness this group of teachers moved relatively quickly to a feeling of confidence in doing teacher research, as one of the groups said two weeks after beginning the project: "We can do it!!" By that time some of the participants started referring to the SIP as "MY inquiry project".

The process of engagement in classroom inquiry by this group of teachers was not a linear and gradual process. It was one characterized by realizations and awakenings including dramatic insights in the understanding of their own classrooms' ongoing processes, as well as significant changes in their teaching perspectives and strategies. With reference specifically to teachers' discovery of their students' voices, this was preceded by teachers' enhancement of democracy and curriculum flexibility in their classrooms, which in turn facilitated teachers' realizations in the changes of their teaching philosophy.

Teachers enhancing collaboration and more democratic participation in their classrooms

Many of the teachers' experiences in the TEP sessions were transferred directly or indirectly to their classrooms, such as collaboration in their SIGs, development of individual and group voices, value of affect and feelings concerning teaching and learning, advantages of fostering multiple perspectives regarding a given matter, active participation in constructing curriculum,

to mention some of them. Teachers' recreation of those experiences in their classrooms put emphasis on collaboration, giving children more choices, students' active participation in curriculum decisions, and awareness of students' capability of participating thoughtfully in curriculum decisions.

Collaboration:

Teachers' experience in collaboration in TEP, especially the SIG and other group activities, was very positive for all of them (Torres, 1996a). They became better aware of the power of sharing their inquiry experiences and constructing meaning together out of those experiences. Collaboration was not only celebrated by this group of teachers, but transferred to their own classrooms.

Laura found in her systematic inquiry group (SIG) the support and help to promote collaboration in her students: "Being in the SIG reinforced the concepts I wanted to convey in my students' cooperative learning groups, i.e., exchanging ideas and learning from each other" (Reflection on SIP).

For some teachers, collaboration in the classroom was due to the inquiry project: "There was more collaboration in my classroom because of the project. I was and am asking input from the students whenever possible; I want to encourage their involvement" (Sally, SIP paper).

Laine was experiencing a lot of resistance from students to following her rules in a class arrangement and competition game for reviewing academic material. Eventually she accepted collaboration as an alternative to competition:

> "I want to create a more relaxed environment, where students are encouraged to talk together... I've found that some students find learning with others more productive than a competition game for reviewing material" (SIP paper).

Introducing more curriculum choices for students:

Janet was having problems with a well-structured literacy program for second graders because it was not "meeting students'needs". She went on to design a new format of curriculum activities including mandated and elective activities to pick from, and for doing them in the order they chose. After some weeks of carrying out those changes she asked her students about their feelings toward this new format:

> "The word that kept coming up over and over and over with many of the kids, was about choices, I like to have the choice, I like to be able to decide what I wanna do. I like to be able to... you can pick the

order. I like the assignment sheet because you can choose what to do. That was confirming me that I was at least on the right track" (SIP presentation).

Jan's inquiry project focused on interaction of children across grade and ability levels if they are given the choice to choose with whom to play or work:

> "I was trying to provide time for them to make choices... Would they choose to interact across ability levels if given a choice. I like to offer'em choices to work with a partner or work by themselves" (SIP presentation).

Teachers like Janet and Jan were already very engaged in readings concerning children's choices, and in trying to integrate such choices as a fundamental component of their curriculum. The systematic inquiry project was for them an opportunity to test and validate for themselves how to engage children in making choices and the consequences of doing so.

Students' active participation in curriculum decisions:

Some teachers allowed their students to actively participate in curriculum issues by surveying their opinions, letting them vote, organizing a classroom meeting to discuss schedule, content, ways of working, etc.

Patricia chose math as the area of her inquiry project. She did a survey of students, asking them for their input on reorganizing math to improve their learning:

> "Students preferred math in the afternoon... They asked me for more time. I gave'em more time... They started using a different assessment like math journals, worksheets, participation, observations and workbooks"(SIP presentation).

Patricia accepts the partnership with her students in classroom decisions:

> "I do surveys. The kids want to do a survey on whatever we wanna do... And they really enjoy, 'cause they feel that they're..., especially the math, they feel that they have an input and they're gonna decide how to do it. I'm giving'em more choices... It was a lot for me to change, but the kids seem to like it" (SIP presentation).

Sally, after engaging in the inquiry project, allowed her students to vote on the next unit to be studied in the science class: "The students were given a chance to voice their opinion, a sort of debate. It was a lively discussion. Then the students voted. The majority voted to study the unit on Earth next" (SIP paper).

For Marilyn her students were co-researchers: "I decided from the onset of my inquiry to make my students co-researchers, thus I have involved them in discussions of assessment as it relates to student improvement".

Preston was already half way to allowing students to make very crucial curriculum decisions. However, his participation in TEP and specifically his inquiry project allowed him to reflect and talk about this turning point of his teaching philosophy. In his history class he asked students: "What do you guys want to learn in history?" (Presentation on 'Commentary'). In his coaching he also asked students to come up with the play:

> "I said to my team: Our unbalanced play doesn't work, you come up with your own. And here are the criteria and I gave'em the criteria. They came up with the best balanced play we have. But they bought into it. They had ownership in the team" (SIP presentation).

In general terms, this group of teachers was increasingly using expressions like: "student ownership", "give children choices", "students' decisions", "students as co-researchers", "students' input", "find out students' perceptions and feelings", etc., which show their increasing awareness and receptiveness to students' active participation in some decisions previously the exclusive domain of teachers. Some teachers were more ready than others, but the engagement in the SIP and the other participative activities in TEP provided them with the language, audience, assistance and opportunities to develop those practices and reflect and construct meaning upon those practices. It is important also to consider how some of these teachers modeled for the other teachers the trying of new things, including risk taking.

Awakening to students' 'new voices'

As teachers consciously opened their classrooms to more active students' participation they began awakening to students' 'new voices'. Taking 'voice' and 'voices' in the Bakhtinian sense as "speaking personalities", the students' 'new voices' are increasingly heard mainly because teachers are more willing to share their classroom power by providing students opportunities to express their perceptions and feelings and above all by paying more attention to what they say as individuals and as a group.

These new dimensions of students' voices had for teachers a sense of 'revelation', something unexpected and insightful that definitely changed their perceptions of their students and

consequently their perceptions of their roles as teachers, as well as their own teaching perspectives.

Some teachers were really amused with students' thoughtful and skillful participation, which made teachers recognize their underestimation of students' capabilities. Preston is positively surprised with students' ownership and abilities:

> "And it just took one little thing, by giving ownership back to the players, and they responded SO WELL (stressed), they had so much fun with that, I began to ask'em questions again. That would've been the last person I would've asked, would've been an athlete. I would've asked another coach, I would've asked an administrator, or a parent or someone. I never asked the kids before" (SIP presentation).

Rick asked his physical education students about their feelings with respect to different units (sports) carried out in the class. In doing so he had good and guilty feelings:

> "It was really good to listen to what kids had to say... It bothers me to know that some kids felt inadequate in the class. I thought I was doing a very good job. The kids love me, teachers love me, the principal gave me top marks" (SIP presentation).

Other teachers were very pleased with students' abilities to teach each other and to learn from each other. Laura implemented cooperative learning groups in her class and she was very excited with the results: "I am learning from my students that they are capable of teaching each other, as long as they are provided with some directions and reminded of their responsibilities". Brandi was also pleased with children's interaction:

> "The learning that was happening among them (children)... They had a choice to work together on the story or work by themselves. And I found that each was working on their own story, but talking to each other, so I've seen some of the benefits of changing the style (giving more choices in grouping), they were helping each other with their projects" (SIP presentation).

She also was very surprised with a student who 'suddenly' assumed a very active role in her small group because of the new way of grouping: "Much to my delight, Lina, one of my quietest and least skilled students, had become the leader of her group" (SIP paper).

Brandi's surprise came as a consequence of her new classroom grouping, a new form of "participation structure" that enabled some children to play out their strengths. Doing micro-ethnography of the classroom, Erickson and Mohatt (1982) were able to observe how small changes in "participation structure" in the classroom makes "a big difference in the interactional ways children engage the content of the school curriculum" (p.170). Thus, the authors maintain, a more "culturally responsive pedagogy can be developed" (p. 170).

Janet was delightfully surprised by her second graders' response to her invitation to work together on the curriculum design:

> "I decided to have my students (second graders) work with me to design the next class assignment sheet. They amazed me with their creative suggestions... I was seeing children expanding their interests and articulating their needs. It's enlightening to learn that students can and will make appropriate choices regarding their learning when given options to do so" (SIP presentation).

In opening her teaching style she asked her students: "What do you guys think about that?" (the new format of activities and the possibility of choosing from several and doing them in a different order).

> "I was assuming that kids did not like some activities. Some kids told me that they really liked them. It was a revelation for me... They asked me 'why are we not doing spelling on this? And I kind of step back and say 'well... I don't know why are we not doing spelling on this'. If this is working on their areas of interest, I said 'well how do you guys learn spelling words?'. So then we came up with a whole list of ways of different kinds of spelling words... In the next weeks they had choices about how they are going to learn spelling words" (SIP presentation).

As with spelling, Janet was surprised by the children's perceptions of and strategies with *body reading*, their perceptions and values regarding what is a good reader. Marilyn also came to realize the high value that her students assign to grades, even though she was trying to stress other values on assessment: "My discussion with students informed me of what they value in terms of assessment".

Sally saw her students changing attitudes as a result of their participation in the inquiry project. These changes provide her with persuasive reasons to open her teaching style to students' participation.

> "With the lunch group (inquiry participants) I see myself joking, unstructured, the students doing most of the planning. I would like to see myself lighten up a bit more in the classroom...In letting the students give me feedback and input on classroom ideas and objectives, I see the students' attitudes change. They have a sense of ownership in the class.. Their input helps me decide what and how I am going to teach them. I hope to continue in this process for the remainder of the year and also in coming years" (SIP paper).

Teachers' discovery of students' 'new voices' was a really a salient and recurrent theme of change when they were talking about their experiences in TEP and specifically in doing the inquiry project. But I always wondered about the absence in their discourse of explicit references to the cultural background of students. They did refer very frequently to "individual differences", "individual needs", "meeting individual needs", etc. This is really noticeable

given the fact that these group of teachers work with a high percentage of minority students. Do they consider cultural relevance of curriculum the same as meeting individual needs? This led me to think of another question: was this group of teachers paying the same attention to the 'new voices' of *all* their students?

Awareness of changes in teaching philosophy

Fullan (1985) found that teachers' beliefs about teaching change when they see the transformation in their classes and in the behavior of their students as a result of the changes they introduce. Something similar happened to most of this group of teachers. They experienced students' transformation, new dimensions of their voices, facilitating thus the connections with their teaching transformation. Unlike Fullan's description of the process as linear, for participants in TEP, the process was dialectical, that is, a mutual and dynamic interdependence between changes in students and changes in teaching perspectives. The dynamic began and/or was nourished in TEP in general and for some specifically while engaging in their SIP.

Some teachers engaged in deep transformation of their teaching philosophy. Rick was one of them:

> "This is something very new to me... For me to ask students what they feel about the class would never have crossed my mind, to do something like this. I mean, my attitude was: I got on the world before you got on. I know what's best for you. How can you possibly tell me what... you know... That was my attitude. I felt that you need this and I thought I knew what is best, but... But through this program I have come to find out that I can actually talk to these kids and did. I sat down with'em and interviewed them" (SIP presentation).

He is indebted for his changes in methods to his inquiry group.

> "As the process continues I am currently working on a class survey to get an even better feel as to how my students feel about P. E. Also I will be video taping some of my classes. All these methods I have used and plan to use in the future are a result of the conversations with my SIG group. I really appreciate their honesty and constructive criticism" (Rick, SIP paper).

Janet's awakening to her students' 'new voices' was a delightful "serendipity reward" as she herself called many of her experiences in TEP. Actually, children's surprisingly positive reactions were a reward for her risky decision to change from a very structured classroom to a more open and flexible curriculum and teaching style. This prompted her new understandings:

> "Although focused on the needs of the students, the changes I have made to the literacy program have impacted my beliefs about teaching and my understanding of children" (SIP paper).

Brandi also prized highly the opportunity to learn from her students because of her engagement in the classroom inquiry:

> "The main point that I keep coming back to is: I LEARNED (stressed) so much from my children and I'm always searching for ways to improve my teaching and I talk to other teachers, and I read materials... and there is SO MUCH (stressed) that I was missing just in my classroom" (SIP presentation).

She came to realize that inquiring her teaching and listening to her students is truly enlightening.

> "My involvement in this inquiry project led me to places which surely would have gone unnoticed otherwise. It has led me to the conclusion that I need to listen to my work and it will tell me what it needs. It has probably been doing this for the past nine years but I am now able to hear it!!!" (SIP presentation).

Despite the fact that Brandi was listening to and hearing students' voices, she questioned herself concerning children's actual participation: "My classroom is a child-centered environment but do my students participate in a child-centered day?" (SIP paper). That question may show her concern with power in the classroom. No further information allowed us to see how far she is going in this regard.

For Preston issues of power and authority have to be rethought and relocated in order to have true students' participation and engagement: "You have to leave your ego, you have to leave your authoritarian figure, all of those things, in order to give ownership back to those kids" (SIP presentation).

For some teachers, there were periods of time when they felt very uncomfortable sharing power with the students. Patricia was one of them, but she eventually accepted that change:

> "I started talking to the students in a softer voice. I had been demanding but now I was asking input from them. As time went on I got more relaxed, I guess because I had accepted the change. I wasn't fighting it any more. I had become better acquainted with my students" (Reflection on SIP).

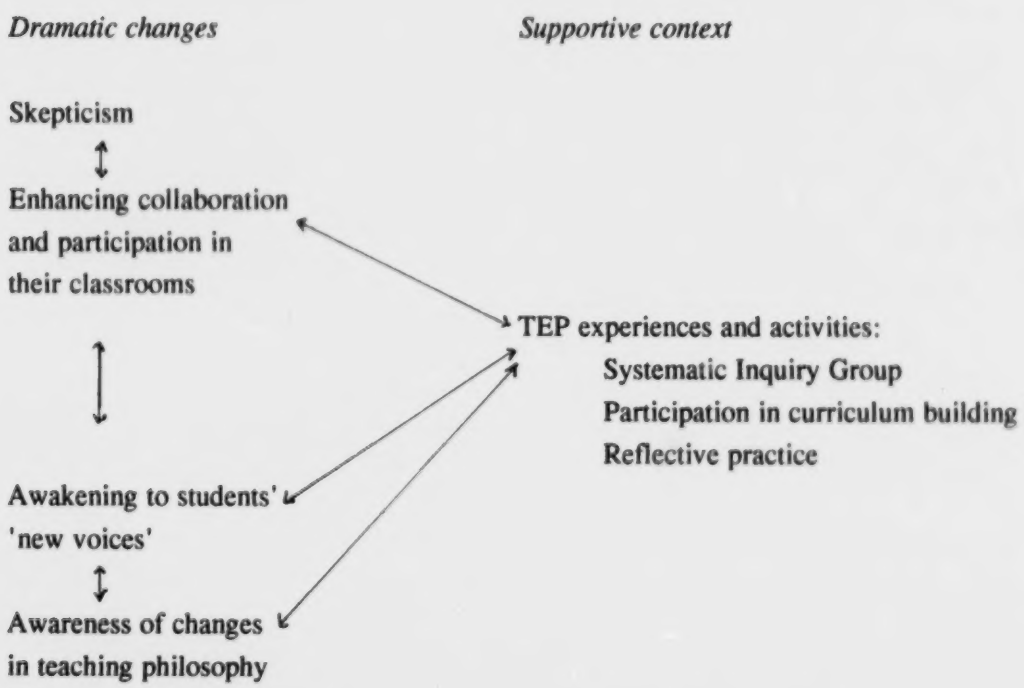
Although some teachers did not articulate explicitly the impact of their experience in doing classroom inquiry on their own teaching philosophy as in the excerpts presented above, we cannot assume that they were not impacted. In the staff conversations there was some evidence in this respect. There were also different degrees of engaging and consequently different degrees of impact on their teaching. There was only one out of 24 teachers whose

teaching was hardly impacted by her classroom inquiry. Actually, she did not engage herself completely in the project.

DISCUSSION

Teachers' engagement in classroom inquiry within the context of TEP has been shown to be a transformative experience of professional development and consequently of teaching improvement (Torres, 1996b). Looking at the specific dimension of teachers' discovering of students' 'new voices', their transformative process evolved from skepticism to one of connecting and transferring their own experience of collaboration in SIGs and participation in TEP into their classroom by enhancing collaboration among students and evoking more democratic participation from them. One of the most noticeable results of doing so was their awakening to students' 'new voices', which in its turn facilitated teachers to become aware, articulate and/or accept the changes in their own teaching methods, perspectives and philosophies. This transformation took place in a context in which teachers were themselves living significant experiences, working with their systematic inquiry groups and their peer support teachers as members of a community of inquirers on their teaching.

Teachers' transformative process in doing classroom inquiry



Although the pattern of this process of transformation appears to have consecutive steps it is not a linear chain of cause-effect relationships. Actually, there are revolutionary changes as opposed to gradual development. One step ahead in this process may represent the influences of previous steps, but also reinforces the understanding of them, and in turn influences further steps. The notion of dialectical relationship allows us to understand the complex interdependence of the different situations and processes and the teachers' dynamic understanding of them.

This close examination of the process of transformation of teaching practices and perspectives for the growth of students' voices is quite insightful for rethinking of the teacher education model based on the dualist relation between theoretical knowledge and educational practice. This model implies that teachers are only 'appliers' of the educational knowledge that comes from outside their classrooms and schools, mainly from the university professors and researchers. What this study suggests in this respect is as follows: a) Without express indication by the program staff, teachers recreated into their classrooms the significant experiences they were having in the program; b) As teachers engaged in classroom inquiry, they were looking at and reflecting on their teaching, becoming aware of assumptions and theories inherent in their teaching; c) In the SIGs and other group activities teachers were sharing their experiences, learning together and constructing pedagogical knowledge while growing as a community of inquirers; d) Many of this group of teachers engaged in dramatic transformation of their teaching including their awakening to students' 'new voices'.

Why was this group of teachers skeptical of being involved in classroom inquiry? From a historical perspective, teacher education has been predominantly technological as opposed to a liberal formation. Traditional education and positivist research legitimize this way of looking at education as the technical end of the continuum. Thus, the teachers' main role is "transmission of knowledge, but do not participate in its generation and selection" (Ginsburg, 1988). Actually, for the most part, colleges of education do not give formal training in research except as part of doctoral studies to prepare candidates to do their dissertations. The dissertation itself often represents for educators more an academic requirement of the university rather than a fundamental component of their development as teachers. The relevance and connection with teaching is spurious or does not exist at all.

Another related phenomenon is the mystification of educational research in attempting to deal with 'hard data' as modeled by research in natural sciences, in order to reach the status of 'scientific research'. The impact is quite clear: teachers' intimidation to engage in classroom research, fearing that it will not be valid and replicable according to the conventional criteria of *objectivity* and *generalizability* of 'scientific research'. The principles and practices of the teacher research paradigm challenge directly and openly those criteria of validity, subjugating them to those of improving teachers' understanding of their teaching and their students. However, there still persists a certain kind of intimidation with regard to sharing their insights outside a close circle of colleagues. In some cases such is the intimidation that it becomes a sort of 'learned disability'. Thus the 'scientific' language, procedures and criteria become a "regimen of truth", using Foucault's (1971) expression.

When this group of teachers embraced the TEP they were all looking for enhancement as teachers and as persons. Some were already half-way to that goal, whereas others were only on the threshold. At any rate they configured different *zones of proximal development,* using Vygotsky's (1978) term, in which they model, foster, validate and induce each other to take risks and try new approaches in their classrooms. Some needed only the audience and the validation while others needed modeling, induction and support. These *collective zpd's,* as Moll and Whitmore (1993) call them, are a crucial component of the TEP, and the successful engagement of these teachers in classroom inquiry led them to the discovery of students' voices. Risk takers modeled for other teachers their ways of trying meaningful and successful innovations in the classroom. In addition, the act of articulating for the group what they were doing and the meaning of their findings constituted growth for them also.

Regarding methods of gathering data in classroom inquiry, teachers were encouraged to use a diversity of methods and sources, including students' and/or parents' perspectives on the matter under study. Teachers that set up more open arrangements in order to listen to children's voices were the most surprised by them. Those teachers that relied on their reflective journals as an almost exclusive source of information for their inquiry project have no account of students' 'new voices'. This may imply that teachers' reflective journals do not always allow teachers to be enlightened by students' voices, yet they are powerful tools for reflection and classroom inquiry. Combining journal keeping with other methods that look directly for students' reactions, feelings, perspectives, etc. may be a functional and appropriate strategy for teacher inquiry.

From a multicultural perspective on education, teachers' enhancement of collaboration and more democratic student participation in their classrooms may open possibilities for students from cultures different from the teacher's and/or that predominant in the classroom, to express themselves in a more open way. A few teachers were pleasantly surprised by the response of ESL (English as a Second Language) and other minority and 'disadvantaged' children as a consequence of changing the grouping, class activities, rules of participation, etc. Curiously, teachers did not refer explicitly and directly to the importance of cultural relevance of the curriculum; not at least in the documents and information I have available for this report. Given this, there exists the possibility that children were heard as individuals but not as cultural beings. The noticeable absence of 'cultural relevance' discourse is worrisome. O'Loughlin (1995) emphasizes the need for culturally relevant teaching in order to hear students' voices: "It would appear that if we are to hear students' voices, we must be willing to explore culturally relevant forms of teaching" (p.110). When teachers are not aware of the cultural diversity of their students, their own culture will be the standard norm for looking at everything that is happening in the classroom. "Lack of cultural awareness emphasizes what they [students] can't do rather than what students can do" (Moraes, 1996, p.121). Nonetheless, teachers did refer frequently to the discourse of 'individual needs' and 'meeting individual needs'. The apparent reduction of culturally relevant teaching to the focus on meeting individual needs is connected to the ascendancy of individualism as opposed to collective purposes and interests. Sleeter points out this conservative return of society and therefore of education in the last decade: "Empowerment commonly now means individual advancement rather than collective empowerment and mobility" (p.228). At any rate, the teaching that focuses strongly on meeting individual needs does not imply necessarily culturally relevant teaching. The 'language of lacking' may be misused to justify teachers' own agenda and perception of students' needs regardless whether their teaching and curriculum are relevant for certain groups of students. Ladson-Billings (1995) observed teachers' culturally relevant teaching and noticed that they did not use the 'language of lacking' to refer to students. On the contrary, these teachers were very commited to do whatever possible to help students to succeed.

The educational progressive discourse of "self-directed learner", "activity choices", "self-selected activity", etc. sounds like the concretization of democracy in the classroom. It may be so, when and if all the children belong to white-middle or upper class families and communities. Delpit (1993) has observed that when teachers become aware of their power over students, they tend to de-emphasize it by moving toward indirect forms of teaching which may favor the forms of communication of middle- class students but may represent a puzzle

for those students who do not master indirect communication and control. In like manner, Bernstein (1975) talks about "invisible pedagogy" as opposed to "visible pedagogy": "The more implicit the manner of transmission and the more diffuse the criteria, the more invisible the pedagogy; the more specific the criteria, the more explicit the manner of their transmission, the more visible the pedagogy" (p.6). The invisible pedagogy, he maintains, usually represents for white middle-class children the possibility of inclusion of the culture of their family into the classroom, whereas it may be very alien for the children of the working class. For both the child and his/her parents, the rules of behavior and performance and communication of the "invisible pedagogy' are difficult to grasp and may represent a discontinuity between the pedagogical values of the parents and those of the classroom.

In order to hear the voices of all the students we need to develop participative, culturally-relevant teaching to work *with* them toward empowerment and social transformation. Freire (1992) maintains that a dialogical pedagogy implies that the teacher work *with* the students toward liberation and critical literacy. Hence, the growing of students' voices is intimately connected to the growing of teachers' voices.

FINAL REMARKS

Although focusing mainly on the dimension of teachers' discovery of their students' voices, this study sheds light on teacher education, beginning with the TEP itself, and on teacher research as a strategy for professional development. The major insights have to do with:

1. Teachers' *transformative process* was facilitated by their engagement in systematic inquiry of their teaching within the context of TEP. They went from skepticism to increased democratization of their classrooms, awakening to new dimensions of students' voices and of their own teaching by: a) Transferring creatively those living and meaningful experiences they had in TEP into their classroom; b) Engaging in an inquiry project including multiple methods and perspectives which facilitated the discovery of their students' voices; c) Changing to a more egalitarian atmosphere and becoming more sensitive to their students' feelings and inputs; d) Sharing their ongoing experiences and constructing pedagogical knowledge with their peers in the SIGs and other group activities.

2. The fears and skepticism teachers expressed at the beginning may be related to their lack of formal training in educational research and the negative impression of published educational

research that often appears as irrelevant to classroom needs and is in addition mystified by the use of esoteric language and procedures.

3. Enhancing collaboration and more democratic students participation in the classroom is a necessary but not sufficient condition to assure culturally relevant teaching. Teachers need also to develop a very acute awareness of the diversity of modes by which students make sense of the world, involving gender, race, ethnicity and social class.

4. Democratization of the classroom by giving more choices, allowing students' participation, learning by discovering, self-direction - a sort of *invisible pedagogy* - without cultural awareness, may result in an enigmatic environment for children from 'other' cultures and working class families.

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